

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Fellowships
Ancient Near Eastern Studies

National Endowment for the Humanities

Division of Research Programs

Excerpt from a Successful Application

This excerpt from a fellowships application is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every application is different, depending on the requirements of the project, the stage of the research, the resources required, and the situation of the applicant. This sample includes only the narrative and the bibliography; it does not include the résumé or letters of recommendation.

Additional examples of funded applications can be found on the Division of Research section of the NEH website: <http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/divisions/Research/index.html>

Project Title: The Eastern Mediterranean in the Age of Ramesses II

Project Director: Marc van de Mieroop, Columbia University

Result: *The Eastern Mediterranean in the Age of Ramesses II*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

In 1274 BC, the armies led by kings Ramesses II of Egypt and Muwatallis of Hatti clashed in a major battle near the city Qadesh in southern Syria. This direct confrontation between the two leading powers of the Middle East heralds the breakdown of an era of internationalism that had characterized the eastern Mediterranean world for some three centuries. During these centuries, the region was involved in a complex system of political, social, economic and cultural interactions, without a single center of power, but with a constantly changing set of predominant states. International exchange was extensive and far-reaching: Babylonian art objects found their way to mainland Greece, Egyptian letters were sent to central Anatolia, Mycenaean pottery ended up in the Levant, and so on. This international period broadly encompasses the fifteenth through twelfth centuries BC, and the region involved in it stretches from the Greek mainland to western Iran, from the northern Aegean to the Sudan. The territories and main polities that participated in this system were: Mycenaean Greece, Cyprus, Hittite Anatolia, Canaanite western Syria, Mittani in northern-eastern Syria, Assyria and Babylonia in Iraq, Elam in western Iran, and Egypt. Some states had control over adjacent regions, such as Nubia, which was under Egyptian administration, and in all of them there were varied zones, usually urbanized lowlands and highlands characterized by transhumance or village settlements. Moreover, they were in contact with peripheral areas, such as northern Anatolia, the north-African coast, and the Jordanian plateau.

The eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth through twelfth centuries BC is interesting not only for its international character, but also for the abundance of documentation available for historical study. There are few moments in pre-modern history in which the scholar has access to information that elucidates an international political system from the point of view of many of its participants. Usually one center only provides the material that becomes the lens through which we examine a historical situation, but in the eastern Mediterranean of this era we find an exception to that rule. Many of the various major and minor states of the region produced written evidence that sheds light on the international system in which they were involved from different points of view. Moreover, archaeological data from the region allow us to investigate the literate societies in a multi-faceted way, while they provide crucial information on the neighboring non-literate societies or those whose texts we cannot fully comprehend.

The political history of many of the major participants and some of the minor ones in the international system of the time is well-known, as well as their diplomatic and military contacts. The project proposed here does not intend to write a political or diplomatic history, however. Its title is conspicuously inspired by F. Braudel's classic work **The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the age of Philip II**, and it intends to do something similar to that book: I will investigate long-term trends and patterns on a regional scale. I will look at the eastern Mediterranean as a unit rather than a conglomerate of individual states, and focus on economic, social and civilizational conditions. I will not only discuss trade contacts, but also how socio-economic changes or crises in one area had repercussions elsewhere. I will investigate how the regional system led to an exchange of ideas, traditions, and behavioral patterns, and explore how the system was able to maintain itself with relative stability for about 300 years. Political history will play a role in this study. The lobbying for power between the various eastern Mediterranean states needs to be kept in mind. While Egyptians, Mittanians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Hittites tolerated each others' presence, they constantly competed and fought over interjacent areas. All these elements will be investigated within a regional context. My approach could be called transnational, although the term nation is anachronistic for this period. As Ramesses II was the longest-ruling king of this epoch and he provides a prime example of how one king's actions affected those surrounding him, I have chosen him as the eponymous ruler of the project title.

The project will result in a book with nine chapters, each of which will develop an aspect of the history of the period (political, social, economic, diplomatic, etc.). Many chapters will start out with a case study from one of the multiple participants in the system, and then extrapolate from it to elucidate what happened elsewhere. The chapter titles are provisional:

- 1) The world in 1274 BC: This chapter will place the eastern Mediterranean of the late second millennium BC in a world historical context, stressing its unique position in ancient history as a region with numerous well-documented literate and urban societies. It will develop the interpretative methods used in the book and stress its transnational approach.
- 2) The actors: the states: Since the history of this region is not well-known outside the world of specialists, this chapter will provide a summary introduction to the intricate histories of the states and areas involved. As an example of the patterns of political development I will focus on the Mittanian state, which evolved from a position of supremacy in northern Syria to become a vassal of its neighbors.
- 3) The other actors: on the fringes of the states In most histories the role of non-literate and non-settled groups is mentioned but not fully investigated as a counterweight and corrective to state histories. This chapter will study those people both outside the borders of the states and within their geographical borders, yet on the fringes of state control. The case study for such people will be provided by the “habiru” of Syria-Palestine.
- 4) Political organization and society: All great states of the region are characterized by similar political structures (highly centralized royal power) and by a social structure that was based on great inequalities. I will argue that the elites withdrew themselves from contacts with the general populations, often by building new capital cities, and will use Akhetaten in Egypt as the case study to highlight the elements of social and political exclusion.
- 5) War and diplomacy: International relations in the period have been investigated often before, especially on the basis of diplomatic correspondence. I will combine the results of those studies with information of treaties and diplomatic marriages, and connect diplomatic activities to warfare. The discussion will start off with an analysis of a single treaty (between Tudhaliyas IV of Hatti and Shausgamuwa of Amurru) where multiple elements of international relations play a role.
- 6) The economy: textiles, metals, and trade: Using the work of Maurice Lombard (Braudel’s colleague in the Annales school) as a paradigm, I will look at aspects of the domestic economies and how their products were exchanged with those of other states. Textile production shows similarities over wide regions, but not a universal use of the same materials (woolens in Asia vs. linens in Egypt), metallurgists faced similar challenges and used similar techniques everywhere, and trade tied people of the eastern Mediterranean region together in unprecedented ways. The case study will be provided by the Mycenaean world.
- 7) Cultures in contact: The dominant literary culture at the time was Babylonian, which dominated to such an extent that people in Egypt with its own flourishing traditions had access to Babylonian literature. Other cultural elements traveled across borders as well, such as visual artistic motives and gods. This exchange was partly encouraged by the exclusivity of the social elite, but also affected other classes of society. The presence of Babylonian literature in archives at Hattusas, Ugarit, Emar, and elsewhere, will provide the case study.
- 8) A Mediterranean system: To explain how this international situation arose, I will rely on Colin Renfrew’s model of Peer Polity Interaction, but I will also point out that this is not historically unique in an environment where territorial states developed.
- 9) The death of a system: Why this regional system collapsed is one of the much-debated questions of the ancient history of the eastern Mediterranean: social tension, invasions, and ecological conditions

have been suggested as answers. The extent of the collapse and its chronology is uncertain as well. This chapter, using western Syria and Assyria as case studies, will focus on how the end of internationalism exacerbated local problems.

An enormous amount of information needs to be digested for this study. The primary written sources available include state archives from Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Hatti, Alalah, Emar, and Ugarit, which contain not only information regarding local affairs, but also the correspondence between the various rulers. Each polity has its own documentation that permits the reconstruction of its history. Moreover, there are treaties between lords and vassals, and between equal powers. There are economic archives, some well-understood like those from Egypt, Babylonia, Hatti, and Ugarit, others more difficult to interpret, like those from Mycenaean Greece. They allow the study of the economic infrastructure of several of the states. Archaeological material is also very extensive. Fortunately, the period is well researched by historians and archaeologists, who have analyzed the numerous data available for individual cultures and societies. Moreover, international diplomacy and trade relations have been studied

extensively. My project is unique in that it takes a transnational approach, surpassing the geographical limits usually employed, and in that it will focus on processes and settings, rather than events. It will base itself on this previous analytical work, synthesizing it in ways not done before, as it will attempt to compare the similarities between these varied cultures, rather than emphasize their differences.

I have collected data for this project for many years, and have twice taught an advanced undergraduate seminar on it at Columbia University. So far, I have written drafts of three chapters. If I obtain a NEH fellowship to be combined with a sabbatical leave from Columbia University, I will be able to write a first draft of the entire book. The research data to be employed and the secondary literature are very familiar to me. I cannot claim competence in all the languages of the primary data, but have full control over the extensive materials in Akkadian and Hittite. The languages of the large majority of secondary literature (English, German, French, Italian) are all very familiar to me. My research can take place at any institution with a good library in ancient studies, and I will decide where to conduct the research later on.

The final product of this project should be similar in format to my book on **The Ancient Mesopotamian City** (written while holding a NEH fellowship). I intend to write a study that is accessible to a wide audience of scholars and educated laymen, that avoids being mired in the minutiae of interpretation, and tries to present material in a context that makes sense of the overall structure. I hope to make the historical riches of this period, perhaps in popular imagination best known for rulers like Agamemnon and Tutankhamun, clear to a wide audience of historians and archaeologists, and to show that the introduction of contemporary historiographical practices can have exciting results for the study of early antiquity.

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